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Iranian Police Link to Tabatabai Murder Probed

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Law-enforcement officials are investigating reports that the head of the Iranian secret police was in the Washington area several days before the assassination of former Iranian Embassy press attache Ali Akbar Tabatabai.

Law-enforcement sources said yesterday that Gen. Hossein Fardoust, the head of SAVAMA, the secret-police agency of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, was reportedly seen in the area shortly before Tabatabai was gunned down in the doorway of his Bethesda home July 22.

Fardoust was also in Paris about a week earlier at the time of the attempted assassination of former Iranian Prime Minister Shahpour Bakhtiar, the leader of exile forces opposed to Khomeini, according to French newspaper reports.

Fardoust reportedly came to the United States recently to step up pro-Khomeini activity here, including acts of violence against Khomeini opponents, according to information provided law-enforcement agencies.

Law-enforcement officials said yesterday they expect to present evidence about the Tabatabai murder and activities in the U.S. of pro-Khomeini groups to a federal grand jury.

Daoud Salahuddin, a 29-year-old District man who worked at the Iranian Interests Section of the Algerian Embassy, is expected to be indicted by the grand jury, sources said. Salahuddin, who is believed now to be in Iran, has been charged by federal authorities with the murder.

But the grand jury will also be presented with evidence that other persons, both here and abroad, may have been connected with the killing of Tabatabai, a prominent Khomeini critic. It also will investigate reports that as much as \$5 million has been funneled into the United States from Iran to finance pro-Khomeini groups, sources said.

One law-enforcement official said investigators are seeking to determine who was "acting as a conduit" for Iranian funds and what role those activities might have played in Tabatabai's murder.

In addition to the reported sightings of Fardoust, there have also been reports within the Iranian exile community that another high-ranking SAVAMA official, Gen. Ali Akbar Farazian, was in the country recently, probably on the West Coast. Some Iranian exiles have drawn a connection between Farazian's presence there and the shooting of a student outside the Los Angeles home of anti-Khomeini activist Cambyse Shah-Rais Aug. 1.

Rumors that SAVAMA chief Fardoust was in Washington have been circulating among Iranians here for weeks. One widely circulated story is that he was seen dining in a French restaurant in Georgetown.

But law-enforcement officials said yesterday that, although they are aware of these rumors, their information comes from independent intelligence sources they categorize as "reliable." The officials said they are actively investigating the information.

Fardoust has been viewed as a mystery man of Iranian intelligence whose loyalty has been questioned by both supporters and opponents of Khomeini's Islamic revolution. He was a friend and military school classmate of the late shah of Iran and later rose to become deputy chief of SAVAK, the shah's secret police.

Ironically, Fardoust was also a boyhood neighbor of Tabatabai's in Tehran in the early 1940s, according to Mohammed R. Tabatabai, brother of the slain Iranian dissident.

But earlier this year Fardoust was identified by U.S. intelligence and Iranian exile sources as the head of Khomeini's SAVAMA, described by some sources as a mirror image of SAVAK. In fact, Tabatabai charged in a newspaper interview shortly before his death that SAVAMA contained virtually the same organizational structure and many of the same agents as SAVAK.

Fardoust's change of loyalties embittered the shah and his family. In her memoir, "Faces in a Mirror," the shah's sister, Ashraf Pahlavi, accused Fardoust of deliberately withholding SAVAK information about a sharp increase in anti-shah sermons in Iranian mosques by religious mullahs.

Pahlavi wrote that the SAVAK's failure to provide the shah with this information during the final years of his reign contributed to his sudden downfall. She said she was "convinced" that Fardoust was negotiating with the still-exiled Khomeini during this period.

Tabatabai's brother, Mohammed, said yesterday that he is confident that the stories that Fardoust and Farazian had recently been in the United States are accurate.

"There were newspaper articles that said that both of them were in Paris at the time of the assassination of the shah's nephew," he said. "There were articles that they were again in Paris when they tried to kill Bakhtiar. If you look at the trend, it is clear that they have come here to eliminate the enemies of Khomeini."

Tabatabai also said that Fardoust's wife and children are now living in the United States, "in the Boston and Connecticut area."

But he said that he is convinced, after talking to many other Iranian exiles, that the two SAVAMA officials came here "to carry on their terrorism."

"They killed my brother and now they're probably going to try to kill me," he said.